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ABSTRACT

To support community efforts to reach out to African American youth confronted with high-risk environments in the cities, the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention has launched the Urban Youth Public Education Campaign. This campaign targets 9- to 13-year-old African American youth in high-risk inner-city environments. The campaign is designed to reinforce ongoing alcohol, tobacco, and other drug (ATOD) prevention efforts. In Phase 1, the campaign targeted youth in 14 major cities. In Phase 2, the campaign is reaching to more cities and collaborating with other agencies to form links between prevention and treatment professionals. This bulletin shares the lessons learned from the campaign's market research, campaign implementation, and materials development phases, and it includes suggestions for other programs. The market research indicated that ATOD use is low among African American preteens and adolescents under age 16, even though African American youth in cities are affected by drugs in other ways. A framework of use, involvement, exposure, and victimization was developed as a result of the market research, and this framework was considered in implementing the campaign in the cities through community collaborations for education and intervention. Suggested applications for other communities derived from early campaign implementation include: (1) address the entire spectrum of health issues and ATOD experience in the community; (2) extend prevention messages beyond issues of use to all levels of the ATOD experience; (3) emphasize the role of families and influential adults in ATOD problem prevention; (4) empower youth in the community; (5) foster positive activities in the community; and (6) use nontraditional messages and messengers. Some specific points for success in working with African American youth are also presented. (SLD)

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ED 422 411

REACHING AFRICAN-AMERICAN YOUTH

WHO LIVE IN HIGH-RISK ENVIRONMENTS

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BY OUR OWN HANDS
A Prevention Campaign for African-American Youth

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE BULLETIN

[redacted]

UD032467

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Public Health Service

Substance Abuse and Mental
Health Services Administration
Rockville MD 20857

Dear Friends and Colleagues:

We are pleased to provide this technical assistance bulletin to assist and guide you in your efforts to reach African-American youth who live in high-risk environments.

It is important to gain accurate insight and understanding about the youth who live in our urban, inner city communities. These youth have been labeled as "hard-to-reach," and as a result are often misunderstood.

We have an obligation as prevention specialists, parents and gatekeepers of their future, to look beyond the obvious, and to challenge the myths and misconceptions that keep us from effectively reaching out to these youth. All youth need the guidance and support of adults. Urban youth who live in environments beset by the problems of alcohol and drugs all around them, the lure of the drug culture, and media images that make use of tobacco and alcohol look glamorous, especially need strong support and reinforcement to avoid these pitfalls and to stay free of alcohol and other drugs. African-American youth are strong and resilient in the face of these odds, but they need the help of adults in the community to keep it that way.

This bulletin is based upon the work carried out in a targeted education campaign, the **Urban Youth Public Education Campaign,** popularly known as **"By Our Own Hands"** in the national community. Extensive time and effort went into learning about the target audience of 9-to 13-year-old African Americans. Many lessons were learned, some of which were surprising. We invite you to delve into the bulletin---we know you'll find it interesting and agree with us that **PreventionWORKS!**

Vivian L. Smith

Vivian L. Smith, M.S.W.
Acting Director
Center for Substance Abuse Prevention

JOINING FORCES WITH THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY

THE URBAN YOUTH PUBLIC EDUCATION CAMPAIGN

African-American youth are products of a strong, vibrant and resourceful culture. Bolstered by a belief in the importance of church, family, and community and an emphasis on innate problem-solving abilities, African Americans have been able to respond to challenges posed by poverty and other stressful situations. Even in the poorest communities, scenes of a people rising above the limitations of despair can be witnessed in the church kitchen, the neighborhood library, the community center, or at the local gym.

Even equipped with such tenacity, however, the realities posed by life in high-risk environments can be daunting. For example, African-American youth are confronted daily by the prevalence of alcohol and other drugs in these communities. Community efforts to address this problem range from Rites of Passage programs (involving activities based on African traditions that help youth make the transition from childhood to adulthood) to parent training and support groups.

To support these community efforts, the Federal Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP) launched the Urban Youth Public Education Campaign. This multimedia campaign targets 9- to 13-year-old African-American youth living in high-risk, inner-city environments. The campaign is designed to reinforce ongoing alcohol, tobacco and other drug (ATOD) prevention efforts in selected cities nationwide. During Phase 1, the campaign targeted youth living in the top Black media markets: Atlanta, Baltimore, Chicago, Dallas, Ft. Worth, Detroit, Houston, Los Angeles, Memphis, New York, Philadelphia, Raleigh, Durham, and Washington, D.C.

Project sites for the campaign's second phase are Baltimore, Boston, Dayton, Detroit, Nashville, Newark, Seattle, St. Louis, Richmond, Hampton, Newport News, Chesapeake, Virginia Beach, Norfolk, and Portsmouth. According to emergency room data from the Drug Abuse Warning Network, drug use is on the rise in these communities. During Phase 2, CSAP is collaborating with the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment and the Office of Minority Health to form linkages between prevention and treatment professionals to broaden and strengthen the reach of the campaign in these cities.

CSAP's strategies are based on the theory that the earlier prevention starts, the more likely it is to succeed. The campaign is thus designed to reach vulnerable youth with prevention messages early on, before environmental and social pressures take hold and ATOD use begins. The campaign is also designed to be culturally sensitive; it seeks to acknowledge and incorporate the cultural heritage of African Americans in its themes, messages, and products.

This bulletin seeks to share the lessons learned from the campaign's market research, campaign implementation, and materials development phases. It also includes suggestions for other programs on how to adapt these lessons into strategies, messages, and materials that communicate ATOD prevention messages to African-American audiences.

MARKET RESEARCH

WHAT WE LEARNED MAY SURPRISE YOU

METHODOLOGY

The Urban Youth Public Education Campaign's innovative approach was shaped by findings from focus groups conducted with 9- to 13-year-olds in the campaign's target cities and by a review of pertinent literature that included national studies, books, monographs, bulletins from public health and social science agencies, newspaper and magazine articles, informal interviews with community prevention agencies, and conference proceedings.

Using these methods, project staff compiled quantitative data on demographics, alcohol and other drug use prevalence rates, media habits; gathered insights into current attitudes; and determined significant influences and pressures in African-American communities.

WHAT'S SO DYNAMIC ABOUT THIS CAMPAIGN?

The Urban Youth Campaign

- Mobilizes African-American communities.
- Creates partnerships with community prevention coalitions, law enforcement, businesses, schools, and youth themselves.
- Dispels myths about African-American youth; addresses all aspects of their ATOD experiences.
- Changes young African American's perceptions to realize that the majority of their peers are not using alcohol and other drugs.
- Celebrates the resilience of African-American youth and their abstention from ATOD use, despite overwhelming odds.
- Emphasizes the importance of church, family, and community.
- Focuses on nontraditional messages and non-celebrity messengers.

FINDINGS

The market research, completed in July 1991, revealed several surprises regarding ATOD use among African-American youth and suggested new ways to approach the challenge of ATOD use prevention in this population.

The research indicates that ATOD use is low among African-American pre-teens and adolescents under 16 years old. However, African-American youngsters are affected by drugs in other ways. These findings led to the development of a new, four-dimension framework to describe their actual ATOD experiences more completely. These levels are: *Use, Involvement, Exposure, and Victimization.*

While "use" and "involvement" are more commonly — and often mistakenly — associated in the public's consciousness with African-American youth, the other levels, "exposure" and "victimization" may be the primary — and often overlooked — ways in which young African Americans experience the effects of alcohol and other drugs.

•*Use:* Contrary to popular belief and the impression produced by daily newspaper headlines and TV news reports, ATOD use is low among African-American pre-teens and adolescents. In fact, Black youth show lower usage patterns than White,

MARKET RESEARCH

Hispanic, and other racial/ethnic populations. In the face of enormous pressures from daily survival in a hostile environment, and despite pervasive negative messages from adults, the media, and other youth, African-American youth abstain from drug use until late adolescence. (The reasons why this resiliency and resistance breaks down are not clear.) However, if and when African Americans begin ATOD use in their late teens, they are at great risk for drinking heavily and using other drugs.

•*Involvement:* Some African-American pre-teens and adolescents are involved in selling and distributing drugs. They serve as lookouts, couriers, cashiers, and messengers. Although drug involvement is seen as lucrative, the market research indicates that, in general, dollar amounts earned in the drug trade are far lower than is usually thought. Existing research indicates that most people involved in drug sales, as defined, are older teens and adults. There is little documentation of such involvement being a major problem for adolescents and pre-teens. More research in this area is needed.

•*Exposure:* Youth who live in inner-city, high-risk environments usually know someone who is using alcohol and other drugs. They often know where to purchase drugs and have witnessed drug-related behavior. As stated by one child in the focus groups, "It's all around the neighborhood, you can't help but see it."

•*Victimization:* Many of these youngsters directly or indirectly experience the impact of drug-related violence and crime, and suffer neglect and abuse by ATOD-using parents and other influential adults.

IMPLICATIONS

Alcohol and other drug use in inner-city communities affects African-American youth in a variety of ways. This expanded framework for describing the ATOD experiences of African-American youth - use, involvement, exposure and victimization - provides a way for the Urban Youth Public Education Campaign to develop prevention messages that address the root causes. And, importantly, this framework calls attention to the resiliency and other positive forces that operate within the lives of African-American youth. Often in the face of limited resources and a lack of community services, these youth are able to create solutions for themselves that do not involve alcohol or other drugs.

Because adults are responsible for much of the exposure and victimization endured by African-American youth, campaign messages were targeted to educate and motivate people and organizations that influence these youngsters' lives: parents and other significant adults, the media, teachers, health care and law enforcement professionals, clergy, coaches, etc. Community mobilization and support are key to enhancing the resistance of these youth to ATOD use, and stemming the effects of involvement, exposure and victimization.

IMPLEMENTING THE CAMPAIGN IN THE COMMUNITY

Known as the "By Our Own Hands Campaign" in the target communities, this program reflects CSAP's commitment to developing long-term, comprehensive programs that involve everyone in the community. Campaign implementation has occurred on two levels: local and national. In each of the target communities, a "lead agency" has been responsible for planning and coordinating the local campaign. Local efforts build on existing coalitions and involve everyone: youth and their families, as well as representatives from education, government, health care, social services, business, religion, and law enforcement.

For example, youth advisory panels have been established in each community to advise adult coalition members; national and local businesses are being asked to offer their support through financial and in-kind donations. Local businesses link with the campaign in a variety of ways such as: providing space for meetings, donating time for television and radio spots, and lending staff for campaign projects. Finally, in every target city, strong relationships with the media have developed to familiarize them with campaign strategies and goals, and ultimately get campaign prevention messages out to the public.

"WE HAVE BETTER THINGS TO DO THAN DRUGS"

This slogan, featured in many print and broadcast materials, captures the celebratory spirit of the campaign. It reinforces what the African-American community already knows — most African-American youth do not use alcohol and other drugs. Instead, in the face of limited financial resources and community services, urban African-American youth are engaged in a variety of positive activities that do not involve alcohol and other drugs.

COMMUNICATIONS MATERIALS DEVELOPED FOR THE CAMPAIGN

Communications materials developed for the Urban Youth Public Education Campaign target three key groups who influence the lives of 9- to 13-year-old African-American youth: the electronic and print media; community intermediaries; and the public, including parents and other significant adults, and the youth themselves. The materials aim to deter and dissuade African-American youth from ATOD use, educate communities regarding the complexities of these youths' ATOD experiences, and issue a "call to action" to influential adults to support and nurture these youth during their most impressionable years.

THE MEDIA

The print and electronic news media wield considerable influence over the

IMPLEMENTING THE CAMPAIGN IN THE COMMUNITY

way African Americans see themselves and are stereotyped by others. To counteract the disproportionately negative portrayals of African Americans in the news and entertainment media the Urban Youth Public Education Campaign has developed an educational video and companion brochure specifically for reporters, editors, and programmers. These materials will help mobilize the media to provide more balanced coverage, particularly in regard to ATOD usage rates among African-American pre-teens and adolescents.

COMMUNITY INTERMEDIARIES

The Urban Youth Campaign has developed fact sheets for influential adults and the campaign's primary targeted intermediaries (sports coaches, low income parent advocacy groups, law enforcement personnel, and clergy). The fact sheets contain highlights of the market research findings and suggest ways to become involved in the campaign.

Another educational product designed for intermediaries is a daily planner, depicting key concepts from market research. Messages will emphasize the importance of family, church, and community, the creation of partnerships within each community, and celebrate the resilience of African-American youth. Such nontraditional products are well received by African Americans and are effective ways to convey these important messages into the daily living and working environments.

GENERAL PUBLIC

Market research conducted for the campaign demonstrates that successful ATOD use prevention initiatives should focus on other issues besides use. Messages need to address ongoing exposure to drug use by adults, involvement in the drug trade, and victimization by ATOD-related crime and violence, and abuse by drug-using adults. This expanded framework will help address the root causes of ATOD use and instill non-use messages early on. These messages will reinforce positive attitudes and behaviors and strengthen young African Americans' continued abstinence through late adolescence — the years when they are most vulnerable to beginning ATOD use.

The Urban Youth Campaign has developed a ten-step guide for African-American parents and the community at large. This guide is an adaptation of CSAP's ten-step "Be Smart Quick List," and includes information gleaned from the market research.

Other unconventional products include multi-use cards which can be used as notecards, bookmarks, and appointment cards. Because of their useful-

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IMPLEMENTING THE CAMPAIGN IN THE COMMUNITY

ness, these cards can be an inexpensive way to keep important ATOD prevention messages circulating on an ongoing basis. Other products include bumper stickers and posters, products which enjoy wide appeal; and transit art and billboards, which are particularly effective communications channels in poor urban communities. And, as always, brochures are important and effective communications products.

Broadcast products developed for the Urban Youth Public Education Campaign include:

- 30-second television Public Service Announcements (PSAs) to be broadcast on cable channels offering Black youth-oriented programming.

- Scripted radio PSAs and "talking points" for disk jockeys (DJs) to encourage repeated references to the campaign throughout the DJ's radio show.

All materials were pretested in the communities to ensure cultural relevance and specificity. For example, pre-testing indicated that communications materials featuring youth and targeting youth, must be current and community-specific. Styles among the young vary enormously city to city and even month to month. If comunications products feature youth who are wearing the "wrong" clothing or engaged in an out-dated activity, young audiences will reject the message along with the messenger. Another finding from the campaign materials pre-testing is that although they may use slang with each other, youth do not like to hear it in campaign materials. They perceive that the slang is being spoken by adults and consequently, it rings false.

APPLICATIONS FOR ATOD USE PREVENTION PROGRAMS

APPLICATIONS FOR ATOD USE PREVENTION PROGRAMS

CSAP believes that many of the prevention messages, strategies, and products developed for the Urban Youth Public Education Campaign complement the endeavors of CSAP grant programs. The following applications can help you reach youth at high risk in your community:

1) ADDRESS THE ENTIRE SPECTRUM OF HEALTH ISSUES AND ATOD EXPERIENCE IN YOUR COMMUNITY.

- Reduce the risk factors in the community that lead to ATOD use and involvement with the drug trade, exposure to ATOD users and illicit drug traffickers, and victimization by drug-related crime and violence.
- Address all aspects of health promotion, not just the unhealthy effects of alcohol and other drugs.
- Promote community health through coalitions of health care providers, neighborhood associations, and social service agencies.

2) EXTEND PREVENTION MESSAGES BEYOND ISSUES OF USE; ADDRESS ALL LEVELS OF THE ATOD EXPERIENCE.

- Recognize that most youth already know that drugs are harmful. While not discounting the seriousness of ATOD use by youth, avoid focusing your programs exclusively on use. Address the other ways alcohol and other drugs affect youth: involvement, exposure, and victimization.
- Counteract the lure of making "big money" through drug involvement. The market research indicates that, in general, dollar amounts earned in the drug trade are far lower than is usually thought.
- Develop messages for adults who affect these children's lives. Adults are clearly responsible for much of the exposure and victimization endured by African-American youth.
- Remind influential adults of their responsibility to set a good example for youth and other adults.

APPLICATIONS FOR ATOD USE PREVENTION PROGRAMS

3) EMPHASIZE THE ROLE FAMILIES AND INFLUENTIAL ADULTS HAVE IN ATOD PROBLEM PREVENTION.

- Develop prevention messages that reach those who influence these youngsters' lives: parents, extended family members, and other significant adults; intermediaries such as law enforcement officials, clergy, sports coaches, and representatives from low-income parent groups and shelters; and representatives from the print and electronic media.
- Involve families and other significant adults in the design and implementation of programs.
- Devise programs that incorporate the assistance of coaches, clergy, law enforcement personnel, and low-income parent groups.
- Develop messages and strategies to reach influential adults and design community prevention programs that encourage one-on-one interaction between youth and adults, such as mentoring programs.
- Include Black males as central figures in prevention messages to African-American youth.
- Educate the print and electronic media about the need for more balanced coverage about the activities of African Americans, especially in regard to young African-American males.

4) EMPOWER YOUTH IN YOUR COMMUNITY.

- Create positive, upbeat ATOD prevention messages for African American youth living in high-risk environments to counteract apathy and despair.
- Highlight the resiliency of young African Americans and their abstention from ATOD use, despite overwhelming odds.
- Establish a "youth advisory council" component to your community's ATOD use prevention activities. Involve youth at every level of program development and implementation. Their input is invaluable. Develop messages and materials that address their concerns.
- Help youth understand information they receive about ATOD issues. Help them synthesize the information and apply that information to their lives.
- Offer programs that foster self-esteem and build resiliency. Teach patience, conflict resolution, and responsibility. Develop specific skills such as learning skills and peer pressure resistance skills.

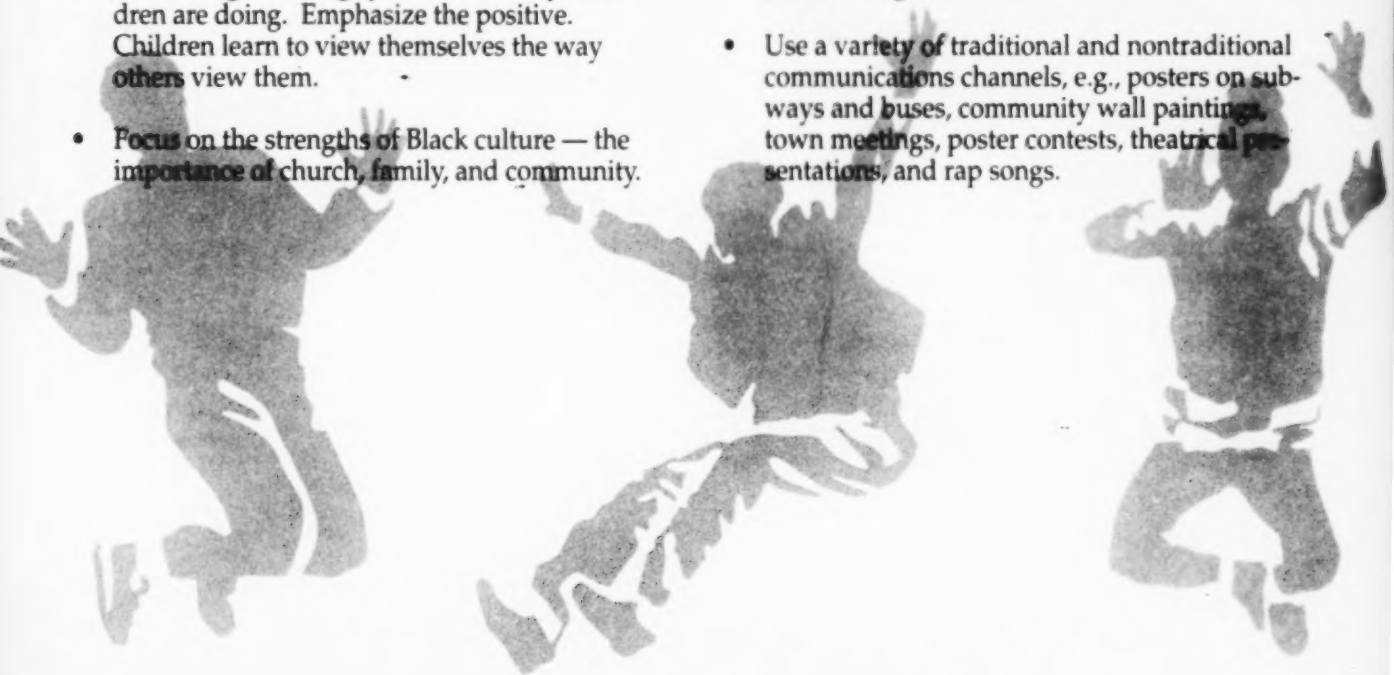
APPLICATIONS FOR ATOD USE PREVENTION PROGRAMS

5) FOSTER "PRO-ACTIVITY" IN YOUR COMMUNITY.

- Offer constructive programs that involve people of all ages.
- Emphasize responsibility to community and to self.
- Use messages of encouragement and hope to counteract the despair and apathy that many in your community may be feeling in regard to ATOD issues.
- Share the good things your community's children are doing. Emphasize the positive. Children learn to view themselves the way others view them.
- Focus on the strengths of Black culture — the importance of church, family, and community.

6) USE NONTRADITIONAL MESSAGES AND MESSENGERS.

- Create culturally appropriate messages that are based on what the residents in your community experience every day. Use messengers that are credible; feature "the people next door."
- De-emphasize celebrity spokespeople. Celebrity images may convey unrealistic expectations of "fast" money and a lavish lifestyle, instead of emphasizing the hard work and commitment that are needed by youth to reach their goals.
- Use a variety of traditional and nontraditional communications channels, e.g., posters on subways and buses, community wall paintings, town meetings, poster contests, theatrical presentations, and rap songs.



WORKING WITH AFRICAN-AMERICAN YOUTH

POINTS FOR SUCCESS

- **NURTURE** African-American children's pride in themselves and remind them of their worth. THINK of African-American youth as "winners." REMEMBER that young people see themselves the way others see them.

- **REINFORCE** what African-American children already know– the dangerous and tragic consequences of alcohol and other drug use. TALK to African-American children early in grade school about resisting involvement with alcohol and other drugs.

- **PRAISE** the courage, strength, and determination of African-American children not to use or be involved in drugs. REMIND children that, contrary to the daily headlines and TV news reports, the majority of their friends and peers are not using alcohol and other drugs.

- **TALK** to children about the daily media images of drugs and violence in African-American communities. Discuss how you both feel about negative TV and newspaper images of African-American youth.

- **ENCOURAGE** African-American children to tell you about their hopes and dreams. LISTEN to what they have to say. You can help transform their dreams into reality.

- **GIVE** African-American children your time and attention. ASSURE them that they aren't alone – you'll be there for help, guidance, and love. Making a difference in even one child's life can make a difference in all of our lives.

- **SET** a good example. What we do influences what our children do. African-American children will respond to our strength. Neighbors, teachers, and the extended family all must join together to set a positive example.

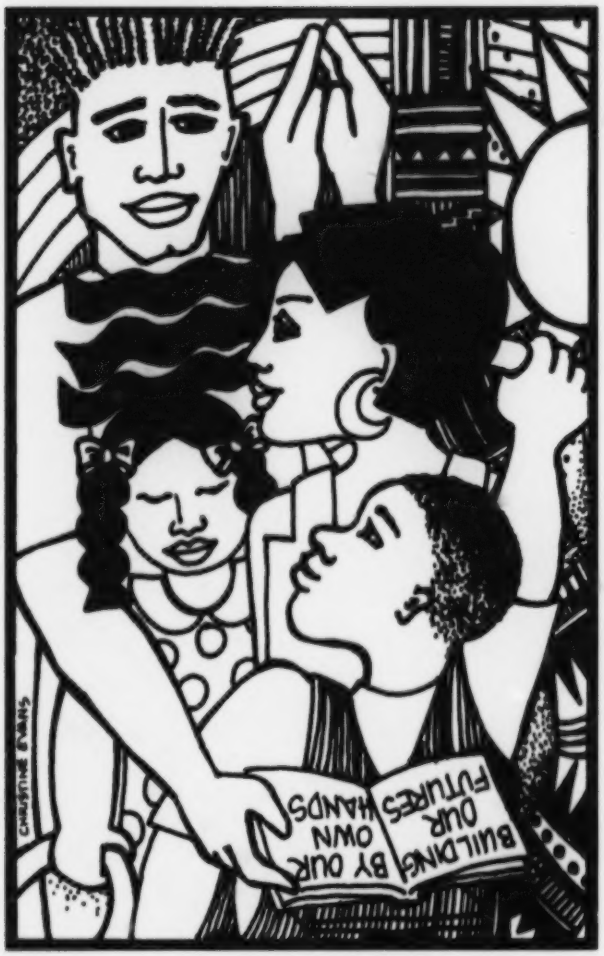
- **TELL** African-American children about friends and neighbors – regular folks, just like you – the unsung heroes who are out in the community, doing good things every day. VOLUNTEER your time and talents to helping youth in your community.

- **STRENGTHEN** the children's sense of being a part of something great – the family of African-American people.

- **GET INVOLVED** with school and after-school activities. Volunteer at churches, recreation centers, school athletic programs, law enforcement agency programs, and parent groups. All can use your talent. Your community needs you! The children need you!

SUMMARY

As you can see, there are many exciting and creative approaches to preventing ATOD use among youth at high risk. By incorporating these applications into local prevention efforts, everyone in the community can become partners in the effort to prevent youth from using alcohol and other drugs. For more suggestions on how to reach these goals, write CSAP's National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI) at P.O. Box 2345, Rockville, MD 20852. Or, call NCADI at (800) 729-6686. NCADI information specialists can provide you with the most up-to-date ATOD prevention resources, research literature, and educational materials.



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